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ABSTRACT

This book contains 28 short anecdotes, stories, poems, student accounts and inspirational items from vocational teachers and students. The items are grouped under the following headings: (1) "The Dog Did It!"; (2) "Sources of Inspiration"; (3) "Student Successes"; (4) "In Their Own Words"; (5) "Life in the Classroom"; and (6) "The Poets' Corner." These pieces provide humor, inspiration, and advice for teachers from teachers on daily life in the vocational education classroom. (KC)

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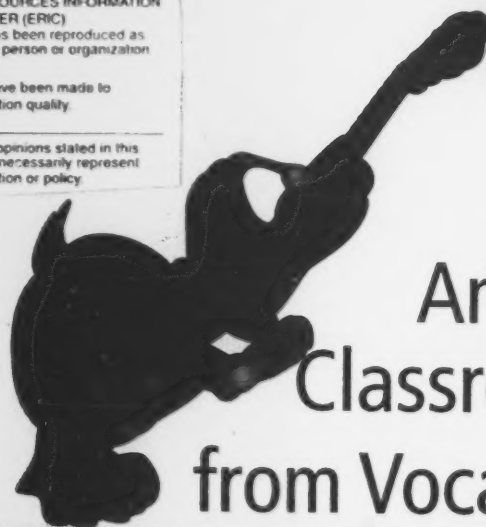
THE DOG DID IT!

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And Other ^{2B}
Classroom Stories
from Vocational Educators

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The Dog Did It!

And Other Classroom Stories
from Vocational Educators

Eric Ries, Editor

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What's *your* story?

AVA invited vocational educators around the country to send us their stories and anecdotes about life in vocational classrooms and labs. The result is the book you now hold. If you have a story or stories you want to share, send them to us at the address below. (For longer stories, please include a disk version in Microsoft Word or WordPerfect in addition to the hard copy.) We'll consider all submissions for publication in a future edition of *The Dog Did It!*

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Or, send submissions via e-mail to eries@avaonline.org.
Please include your telephone number.

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THE DOG DID IT!



The Dog Did It!

by Sarah Osborn Welty

The last day prior to Christmas vacation, I thought I would play my cards right and bring in a guest speaker for the small animal management class. The father of one of my students was a police officer with the drug enforcement K-9 unit. The officer volunteered to speak to my class, and he and his dog, Hash, came in. What better speaker to have on the last day before vacation than a cop?

I thought it would be a quiet day, but it was anything but. As part of the officer's presentation he brought several samples of drugs into the classroom and hid them around the room. They were concealed in file cabinets, on bookcases and in other places high and low. One of the high places was on top of the fire alarm on the wall.

Hash proceeded to start finding the hidden drugs and was alerting us to them by barking and scratching near where they were hidden. I remember thinking the fire alarm didn't seem like such a good place to put some of the bait, but who was I to tell a police officer how to do his job?

As the officer explained to my students why the dog was barking—because he was picking up the drug scent—Hash sniffed out the drugs atop the fire alarm. Wouldn't you know that before we had time to react, his paw had caught the alarm's handle and down it went. The alarm went off, students began leaving the building and I ran to the phone to call the school office.

I don't think the principal liked—or quite believed—my explanation that "The dog did it." Thankfully, however, the police officer backed up my story.

Never since has one of my guest speakers managed to get the

building evacuated on the day before a holiday—or on any day for that matter. But the story illustrates that there may actually be some truth to that old excuse, "The dog ate my homework."

Sarah Osborn Welty is an ag science teacher and FFA adviser at Walkersville High School in Walkersville, Md.

Flunking the "Pop" Quiz

by Charles Lemson

As student services coordinator/counselor I often find myself giving various groups of potential students tours through the Career Center. On one of these occasions, with a small group of resource room students, I ended the tour in our food service restaurant for refreshments. As we sipped on our soft drinks, I discussed the importance of academics related to vocational programs. I stressed the importance of math and spelling.

As we adjourned from the restaurant I was given my bill. It

read something like this: "one 7-Up, three Cocks, two Diet Cocks."

Proof positive.

Charles Lemson is student services coordinator at Mecosta Osceola Career Center in Big Rapids, Mich.

Tiny Bubbles

by Pat Crosier

I teach a medical assisting course that includes laboratory procedures commonly performed in a physician's office. In class a few years back, we had been learning about urinalysis and I had commented during a lecture that an old-time method of testing for sugar in the urine was to taste it.

Well, during a break a couple of my male students went to the break room, bought some apple juice, poured it into the urine cup and began to prepare their specimen for testing. Once back in class, one asked the other, "Is that your urine specimen?" The other student lifted the "specimen" to his lips and said, "It sure tastes like urine." You can imagine the reaction from the rest of the students!

I had noticed bubbles in their supposed urine specimen and had a pretty good hunch about what they had done. I began

laughing, at which point the students who'd pulled the prank said, "Mrs. C., we're sure glad you have a sense of humor."

We had a lot of fun with that story all year long. The taster, by the way, is now in his third year of college, in pre-med. He wants to be a plastic surgeon and work with people who have surgically correctable deformities. The other young man has been working in a medical clinic for three years.

Pat Crosier is an instructor in the medical assisting program at Tulsa Technology Center-Lemley Campus in Tulsa, Okla.

The Eggnapping

by Sandy Lish

I assigned a project to my child growth and development students, hoping they would catch a partial glimpse of parental responsibility. They were to take care of an egg for one week during school hours.

It was business as usual—until the real world peeked in. The egg of one student, Raven, was “eggnapped.” She received a ransom note that read, “Leave three candy bars under the table in the library, or your egg will be ‘fried.’ This is no yolk!”

The student eventually retrieved her lost egg. But I don’t think any of these egg parents will look at eggs the same way again!

Sandy Lish is a family and consumer sciences teacher at Billerica High School in Billerica, Mass.

Starts with a "C"

by Sarah Osborn Welty

Teachers come to realize that students will say the darndest things. Once, in large animal science class, we were covering common procedures performed on large animals—procedures like castration.

As we were reviewing, one of the questions I asked the class was, "What term is used when the male of any large animal is altered so that it is unable to reproduce?" One of the boys thought a second and eagerly put up his hand.

With the look of someone who was excited that he had the right answer, he said, "Circumcision." I laughed and said, "You'd better try that one again!"

Sarah Osborn Welty is an ag science teacher and FFA adviser at Walkersville High School in Walkersville, Md.

When Minutes Seem Like Hours

by Mary Payne Hairald

I sponsor a CVE [Cooperative Vocational Education] club and a DECA chapter. The CVE club meets once a month, every third Tuesday during class. Officers are elected in each class because this gives more students the opportunity to be a local officer. The first and second vice presidents of each club are responsible for inviting guest speakers. The students are responsible for the entire club meeting. I always teach a unit on parliamentary procedure before we have any meetings.

This was our second meeting for the third-period class, and I thought I had thoroughly explained to the newly elected secretary how she should write the minutes. But I got a big surprise. When the president called on her for the reading of the minutes, she walked briskly to the podium and in a very clear voice

said, "The minutes are 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Respectfully submitted, Linda Jones." She then took her seat.

Our guest speaker was listening intently, and I was seated in the back of the room, feeling chagrined. Of course, she got one thing right—our meeting was held from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Mary Payne Hairald, AVA's 1997 Vocational Teacher of the Year, is a cooperative vocational education teacher at Nettleton High School in Nettleton, Miss.

Oh, *Those* Windows

by Brenda Stout

One day in my computer class, a student was really engrossed in her work when another student asked, "What kind of windows do you have?" Looking up from her computer with a puzzled look, the first student answered, "I have Microsoft Windows."

"No," the other student clarified, "your truck windows. It's raining outside!"

Brenda Stout is a business/computer instructor at Kiamichi Technology Center in Spiro, Okla.

Making a Break for It

by Kathy Reed

I am the work-based learning coordinator at my high school and I usually get at least one student a week who comes into my office and asks for "work release." I usually get a good laugh on those days, stringing them along. I explain that this isn't a prison; they can leave at the end of the day. I usually get a blank look, as if to say, "What is wrong with this wacko?"

Then we get to the real questions about credit for work and early dismissal from school!

Kathy Reed is work-based learning coordinator at Highline High School in Burien, Wash.

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION



Her Spirit Lives On

by Linda B. Shelton

I have been rewarded by my students many times in the 18 years I have been a cosmetology instructor in a vocational high school. I enjoy the visits of my former students when they want me to be one of the first people to see their newborn child, or when they want to share wonderful news of a first job in their new profession.

There also have been times in these years when my heart has been broken—when a student has been abused, arrested or become dependent on a controlled substance.

I still miss a student who was such a joy to be around. Paula was the life of my cosmetology class. With a witty remark and a big smile she would break the class into laughter. I had to join

in each time. Her favorite hobby was country line dancing and she danced around the room as she did her work each day. I taught Paula for three years and she completed the 1,500 hours required to take the Tennessee cosmetology licensing examination. She had great plans to be a successful hairdresser and was so excited and nervous the day she took her examination.

Paula called me as soon as she returned from taking the test and said it was hard; she hoped her grade was high enough to pass both parts. She described the procedures she did for the practical examination and discussed some of the answers she gave on the written examination. I assured her she had prepared well and was sure to have passed both parts.

That was the last time I spoke to Paula. A few days later, on the way to a friend's house to cut her hair, she lost control of her car and was seriously injured. Paula survived the accident, but doctors told her that she would be paralyzed without surgery. Paula knew she would need to have those legs working to do her favorite line dancing; the surgery was planned for that

day. Since Paula was on the ICU floor, there were no telephones except in the waiting room. I called the hospital and talked to her sister who told me that Paula was in good spirits and they expected everything to be fine. I told her I would be at the hospital to visit Paula the next day.

Paula did not survive the surgery; something went wrong in the operating room that took her life.

While Paula was in surgery, a letter came in the mail informing her she had passed both parts of the licensing examination. Beside her casket at the funeral home, her mother framed that letter for everyone to see.

I have all my students' graduation pictures framed on the wall of my cosmetology classroom. Paula has an "in memory" heart beside her picture.

I tell the story of Paula to all my new students. I want to impress upon them that they can make people happy or unhappy when they enter a room. Paula's positive attitude and love of

life influenced me to be the kind of teacher that makes each day count for my students.

Linda B. Shelton is a cosmetology educator at Hickman High School in Centerville, Tenn.

Snakes and Satisfactions

by Sarah Osborn Welty

In vocational education we must handle situations other teachers may not have to deal with—some of them good and others not so good. Not-so-good things are like the time you teach a wildlife class and the students, thinking you like snakes (I'm actually terrified of them) bring their pet snakes to class wrapped around their arms, and you're in front of the class and backing away or running out the door isn't an option if you want to save face. Or when your supervisor might make an early exit from observing your class because of a poisoned rat found on the greenhouse floor.

But then there are the rewards, like when students come back after graduation and tell you about situations in which they've

applied or used what you taught them. You feel the satisfaction of knowing you did your job and that, by doing it, your students learned something that day.

Sarah Osborn Welty is an ag science teacher and FFA adviser at Walkersville High School in Walkersville, Md.

Working Smarter

by Kathleen Wilson

This year, the photography class came down to the Education Enhancement Center to use the computers to work on class research papers. They had their reference sources and all we had to do was help them use the word processing program if they needed an assist.

Most of them jumped right in and got busy but there was one girl who was having trouble getting started. She complained that she was so dumb she couldn't even think of a thesis statement, much less get together a whole paper. Writing stuff down just wasn't her "thing," she said. But we gave her some ideas on how to start and soon she was working away, full speed ahead.

The whole class worked really hard for most of the morning and then it was time for them to go back to class. We were try-

ing to help them save their work and shut down the computers when the same girl protested, "We can't stop now—I feel so intelligent!"

Kathleen Wilson is a math lab assistant in the Education Enhancement Center at Tulsa Technology Center-Lemley Campus in Tulsa, Okla.

A Motivational Approach

by Marilyn Smith

In the 11 years I team taught with reading specialist Martha King-Clark, I never found anyone with more boundless energy, more enthusiasm or more interest in students. A teacher in the Education Enhancement Center at Tulsa Technology Center's Lemley campus, Martha is always an inspiration to other teachers.

Once you meet her you'll never forget her. She'll stick out her hand, offer a firm handshake and barrage you with questions. You can't help but like her instantly.

It wasn't long after she started at TTC that she was elected Teacher of the Year. As one teacher put it, "I have only known one teacher other than Martha who was as motivational."

Motivational is a good word. She can captivate a class and send them down all kinds of paths to find learning fun.

Some of the students who find their way to her are not the most popular or the most promising. She is kind to them and seems to find the things that really turn them on to school. She fights for them. In this way, she makes teachers take a second look at students they may have written off as poor prospects.

While I taught with her she took on several programs at TTC. In printing, she taught English usage. In commercial foods, she taught French. In horticulture, she taught cashiering. The list went on and on. She would go into the classroom and win over students to whatever the instructor needed. The staff loved her vivaciousness and willingness to learn.

She was always looking for something new, innovative and exciting that would capture her students' interest and give the material a fresh twist. She could flip through catalogs and find on-target materials that would fit into her program exactly. She

never kept the old, the boring or anything that was outdated.

She started teaching English as a second language in the evening. Students who came to her class learned how to eat Oreo cookies, practiced correct American pronunciations, talked about their most-important dreams. She would ask them to come to her house for a grand banquet and would serve their most cherished dishes. Pictures of her students from those banquets are the most telling. They are all beaming, and smack in the middle is Martha's smiling face.

Her strengths are giving of herself and looking for shortcuts or tricks to make learning easier and less complicated for her students. She tries to shorten the steps. You have to smile at her enthusiasm because she tries so hard to pull the most out of everyone in her classroom.

Of all the aspects of Martha that I like, I most respect her ethics. Though she is beloved by students, she is always so serious about their learning and progress. They always know that

she is the teacher and they are the students. Ethically, she is straight as an arrow. Her work with students is so refreshing.

I moved on to another campus but Martha is still there—working with students.

Marilyn Smith is a reading specialist at Tulsa Technology Center in Tulsa, Okla.

Putting It All Together

by Linda B. Shelton

One of the most rewarding jobs is teaching. No, not for the money you make. The rewards in teaching are the lives you change. You influence each student you teach. You choose whether that influence is good or bad. I choose to be the best influence I can be each day.

Some days that is very hard. Some students seem to be in school to see if you can control your temper. Other students want attention so badly they will do anything to get it. The way you handle various situations shows a teacher's true self. I developed my style from two former cosmetology instructors.

When I attended school to become a cosmetologist, two very different teachers influenced me. Mrs. Anderson was a very

strict, learn-the-basics teacher. She taught me to study if I expected to pass the state board of cosmetology licensing examination. Mrs. Anderson did not show any compassion for students if they were having trouble with a subject. She would make the student stay in the back room and practice on a mannequin until he/she could do those finger waves. It would have been easier if she had been there to guide you. I also remember her harsh words and that she did not smile much.

The other teacher I had was Mr. Mikie. He had a very different teaching style. Mr. Mikie was a fun teacher. He demonstrated lessons with flair. If you did not understand the technique, he encouraged you to try it your way. Then he would show you his way again. Mr. Mikie taught me to be more creative and to do difficult tasks with a smile. He always encouraged a student with a smile, and a "You can do this. Try again."

I graduated from cosmetology college over 30 years ago. When I graduated, I never thought I would one day become a teacher. When I made that decision 18 years ago after working

in the profession, it was easy to decide why I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to teach the basics I learned from Mrs. Anderson, but I wanted to teach them creatively to make each class fun for students as Mr. Mikie did. I wanted to teach my students the skills they need to pass the state licensing examination, but I also wanted them to remember me as a teacher who not only taught them well, but made learning fun. I wanted them to know I care about them.

Linda B. Shelton is a cosmetology educator at Hickman High School in Centerville, Tenn.

You Just Never Know

by Barbara Jacob-Hagy

Many times, as a college student working toward my education degree, I heard the words, "You just never know when you have made a difference in a young person's life." The thought of not receiving immediate feedback on my contribution did not deter me from finishing my degree and beginning my teaching career. I listened with great envy as experienced teachers told of the satisfaction they felt when former students came back to thank them for the impact they had had on their lives. I thought I would have to contribute many years of teaching before I could share that experience.

However, I was rewarded in a most valuable way only three years after I began teaching. As a cooperative education teacher in a comprehensive high school, I choose to include the "I Can"

materials in my curriculum along with the VICA [Vocational Industrial Clubs of America] Professional Development Program. Every Friday, which I termed "I Can" day, I plugged along providing what I thought were sensational activities and exciting lessons for my students. There was often grumbling and whining from my students as I shared with zeal the passion I had for positive thinking in our lives, especially in the workforce. One young man was very quiet and reluctantly participated in the group work and the activities I assigned each Friday. He was one of those students who really bug you. But not for the obvious reasons.

He showed up every day and on time. He did his homework and scored well on assignments and tests. His average was always an "A." But he defied me by not sharing my enthusiasm for the topic I was teaching or for VICA, the student organization I required my students to belong to. I wanted this brilliant

young student to be excited about life and he politely refused to march to the beat of my drum. He had the audacity to be a good student in spite of me. He graduated that year and I often wondered if I could have done something more to get him turned on to life.

Three years later, I ran into him at the local department store. He was the same polite, quiet young man I remembered from the classroom and his words were simple but sweet. "Ms. Jacob, I didn't like it when you forced us to do that club stuff and the positive thinking stuff. But that stuff has helped me more than anything else I had in high school. Thanks for caring enough to make us do it."

Wow! I was overwhelmed. And the sense of pride and the renewal of spirit that followed after that simple message was tremendous. Even though I work with teachers now and not students, I will never forget the message he gave me.

So, when you struggle, as I did, with how to incorporate those "soft skills" into your classroom when the technical skills are so important, remember: You just never know.

Barbara Jacob-Hagy is school-to-work coordinator in the Career Resources Center at Tulsa Technology Center-Lemley Campus in Tulsa, Okla.

A Special Jacket

by Sarah Osborn Welty

As a first-year teacher in Virginia, I taught at a somewhat rural high school that had a total of 800 students, eighth through 12th grade. The agriculture program always seemed to be home for all the special education students who didn't have anywhere else to go in the school. One student I remember in particular was Donald.

Donald was a low-functioning student who was often picked on. As a member of FFA, he wanted an FFA jacket in the worst way. His foster mother had contacted me to purchase one as a birthday surprise. The day the jacket came in, his foster mother asked me to give it to him in class.

To this day I can remember very clearly asking Donald to come up to the front of the room to try on an FFA jacket to see if it fit. He had no idea that his name was on it or why I'd asked

him to try it on. It was a very magical moment when his eyes lit up as he saw his name on the jacket. He said, "Thank you, Miss Osborn," and turned to me to give me a hug. I told him it was from his mom, and, through the tears that were welling up in my eyes, I saw that most of the students in the class were very quiet and smiling at Donald.

When I'm having a bad day and wonder why I teach, I think back to that moment and the opportunity I had to touch a student's world and make it better. I'm also reminded that what I do is important and can affect the lives of students in positive or negative ways.

The reward I received on that day could not be touched or bought, and such rewards don't come around very often. But when they do, I realize why I teach.

Sarah Osborn Welty is an ag science teacher and FFA adviser at Walkersville High School in Walkersville, Md.



STUDENT SUCCESSES

From Co-op to the Top

by Mary Payne Hairald

There are so many student success stories I could cite over the course of my career as a vocational educator—so many lives that have been enriched and so many dreams that have been brought within reach by vocational education. One student of whom I'm particularly proud is Barry Herndon, who remembers very well being told by a high school English teacher that he would never amount to anything if he enrolled in my cooperative vocational education (CVE) program and worked at Wal-Mart.

Barry was a Wal-Mart trainee when he entered CVE in 1980. After a year and a half he was promoted to stockman. He graduated from high school in 1982 and soon worked his way up to

assistant manager of another local Wal-Mart. Barry continued to climb the corporate ladder, managing larger and larger stores in Florida and then moving on to Myrtle Beach, S.C., where his salary was more than \$100,000 a year. He recently returned home to Mississippi and now manages a Wal-Mart Supercenter in Tupelo.

When I asked Barry what CVE had meant to him, he said, "It gives a young person an opportunity to understand the responsibilities of having a job and continuing in school at the same time." He recommends the co-op program to any student in his or her junior or senior year, saying it promotes dedication, hard work and the willpower to set and achieve goals.

Several years after Barry graduated from Nettleton High he came back to speak to my classes. He told them to have faith that they could be whatever they wanted to be—with or without a college degree—if they were willing to put forth the effort. He told them one other thing, too: that he'd like to com-

pare his annual salary with that of the English teacher who'd told him he'd never succeed if he pursued the co-op route to a career.

Mary Payne Hairald, AVA's 1997 Vocational Teacher of the Year, is a cooperative vocational education teacher at Nettleton High School in Nettleton, Miss.

Albert's New Draft

by Bill Edmiston

An individual I'll call Albert reported to my classroom with his assignment sheet in his hand and a warm smile on his face. It was 8 a.m. Thursday, the middle of December 1992. Snow had fallen the night before and a foot or so lay on the cold cement outside.

I gave Albert a briefing on what this program was and what was to be expected of him. He seemed distracted by the cold and uneasy feeling of entering a prison education program. His motive and incentive were to receive one day off his sentence for each day he attended class. We call it half-time—six-and-a-half hours of work a day. Albert took his seat assignment and began on what amounted to a stepping-stone path to a good career in the drafting field.

After a month, Albert had finished a basic, four-function math

review course that sharpened his math skills. He asked to take sheetmetal and welding blueprint-reading workbooks. Three months passed and Albert finished the two workbooks. He became involved in the drafting program and asked if he could try mechanical drawing. I had graded all his assignments and his progress demonstrated that he could move into this field with relative ease.

I asked Albert if he would consider staying in the program to continue studying drafting rather than being sent to a fire camp to be trained as a prisoner/firefighter. He said he wasn't going to camp anyway because of the nature of his crime. He told me violent criminals can't go outside the prison walls and he was going to be "down" for eight years with half. That meant he would be paroled in four years if he stayed "disciplinary [action] free."

I started thinking Albert could complete this program and get a job when he was paroled. I asked to see his central file; that would give me an idea of his background and potential for suc-

cess. His file said he was incarcerated for second-degree attempted murder for shooting a friend of his three times. He blew his buddy's jaw off for not turning down the radio when Albert told him to. I asked Albert about this and he said, "All true. I was drunk and in a bad mood." His buddy lived next door to him in an apartment complex.

Should I take a chance with this guy and groom him for the "real world," or just figure he'd land back in prison again, so why even try? After all, he might mess things up regardless of what I did to prepare him.

OK, I decided, I'll take a chance. I'll train him. Albert studied mechanical drawing with me for three-and-three-quarter years. He became adept at CAD drafting and was faster than any student I'd had before him. He worked well with the other 19 students and showed an interest in helping others. He taught illiterate Hispanic prisoners to read and write on his off time.

Albert left the prison in July 1995. He had accumulated 3,000

hours of drafting time and was a decent drafter. I said goodbye to him with a firm handshake and a pat on the back. "Good luck, Albert!" I told him. "Have a good life and stay out of trouble." I knew he was scared to leave. His mother was picking him up for the trip home to L.A. In 72 hours he had to report to his parole officer.

I often wondered how Albert was doing since his release from prison. Was he back? Did he stay clean from drugs and alcohol?

After two and a half years had passed I got a phone call one day during my class. It was Albert! He had completed his parole "clean and free." He was graduating from a community college with an A.S. in drafting technology and had been accepted to study mechanical engineering at a four-year college. He had worked in a pizza restaurant eight hours a day and carried 12 units in school. His mom had helped him a lot and he was ready to accept another chapter in life.

I told him how personally proud of him I was, and that some-

how I knew he was going to make it. "Good luck, Albert!" I said. "Have a good life and stay out of trouble. I knew you were scared and afraid, but you made it. You Albert, just you!"

Bill Edmiston is a vocational instructor in drafting/blueprint reading at the California Correctional Center in Susanville.

They're What It's All About

by Noah Harrelson III

I've had the privilege of teaching some amazing individuals over the years—people who epitomize what vocational education is all about—skill, savvy, grit and determination. Here are the stories of three particularly outstanding students.

Aaron

Since his birth on January 4, 1978, Aaron, one of my students, has accomplished great things despite long odds, thanks to his own hard work and dedication, the support of his family and teachers, and the work of medical science.

Clinically diagnosed hyperactive and ADD [attention deficit disorder] at an early age, he suffered a head injury when he was

13 months old. This injury brought on the epilepsy that has dogged him throughout his life. Doctors provided medication to keep the seizures under control (allowing Aaron to experience one of the great rites of the teenage years—getting his driver's license) but Aaron had to begin taking more medication, and change drugs and try new ones again and again. Epilepsy was gaining control over him, as all available medications were tried. Eventually, he had to stop driving. But he was fortunate to have caring, dedicated people—especially his parents—to help him through some very difficult times. All the final decisions on what to do were Aaron's.

In 1983 Aaron entered kindergarten in the Putnam City School District in Oklahoma City. Teachers saw his need for help. This is when he began to get one-on-one attention to deal with his learning disabilities. By 1985 the school system had placed him in special education classes. As methods of learning were developed to match his needs, he proved to be a smart young man. In 1989, after moving to the Tulsa area and enter-

ing the Broken Arrow School System, Aaron received as much one-on-one attention as possible. Teachers continued to do the best they could to help.

At the end of Aaron's 10th-grade year his counselor recommended he look into vocational education at Tulsa Technology Center. After interviewing and testing at Tulsa Tech, he decided to enter the major appliance technology program—in which students learn how to service and repair an array of household appliances, including refrigerators and washers and dryers. Aaron began the program the following school year, going a half day at his home high school and a half day at Tulsa Tech.

Aaron entered my class and liked it. He lost some of his enthusiasm, though, when he discovered there would be homework—such as penmanship exercises and a thick book to study on electrical and mechanical components. He had expected much more hands-on training and not so much bookwork. He didn't understand what it was all about and was ready to quit.

I insisted, however, that even though Aaron had a learning disability and difficulty with cursive writing he was going to practice his penmanship daily. Aaron's parents worked with him constantly but patiently. Explaining over and over again the need for clear, legible writing even in this day of computer-generated information, they helped him with his cursive letters and alphabet.

In time his handwriting improved—to the point that I began using his writings to demonstrate to others that they could improve their work if they maintained the same perseverance. Aaron began to wish someone had started him on the reading and writing exercises earlier in his education instead of letting him slide and use his learning disabilities as an excuse not to perfect his skills. Through his constant push to accomplish, rather than saying "I can't," Aaron learned how dedication and an attitude of "Can do, sir" will pay off.

The epilepsy medication problems grew worse again, however, and in January 1997 Aaron underwent seven days of intense

monitoring at University/Presbyterian Hospital in Oklahoma City. The testing seemed to locate the portion of his brain where the trouble was occurring. Aaron would need to take medical leave from the major appliance technology program in the middle of his final year—until doctors were through with testing, evaluation and surgery.

In April 1997 Aaron completed and passed all medical tests and evaluations. Doctors decided he was a good candidate for surgery. They believed a surgical procedure could solve the brain problem that was causing the seizures. From 6:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. on July 8, 1997, he was in the operating room. Doctors performed a partial temporal lobectomy, removing approximately four centimeters of the left temporal lobe in an attempt to cure Aaron's epilepsy. (His medication level is now being reduced gradually, and hopefully will be eliminated eventually.)

Aaron endured great pain and was in the intensive care unit for two days, but was up walking on the third day after the surgery and went back home at the end of the fourth day. He

enjoyed walking around his neighborhood with his "war wound" of 21 staples. Two weeks after surgery the staples were removed and Aaron could resume light chores around the house. He was able to get back into the appliance repair shop he had started in the family garage.

Over the next six months, during his convalescence, Aaron stayed in touch with the major appliance technology program. Periodically he would come to visit. Then, in January 1998—six months after going into the hospital for surgery—he came back to class full time. And he returned with a bang: The local Sears Service Center, admiring Aaron's ability and attitude, soon recruited him for a part-time job. Then, in April, he entered and took first place in the state VICA [Vocational Industrial Clubs of America] skills contest in major appliance repair.

Aaron is one fantastic kid and a true vocational wonder. He never accepted his disability, he always wanted to learn, and he strove to acquire a skill with which he could support himself and, perhaps one day, a family. He has found his niche in the world

through vocational education. I'm proud to have played some small part in his amazing success story.

Glenda

Divorced at 38, with a 3-year-old son and another child on the way, Glenda Nelson had no way of making a satisfactory living. Her work skills were limited. She was a high school graduate, but even with her diploma she couldn't find a good-paying job. She'd had a hard time getting through high school and was scared of having to go back for additional training. But she knew there had to be a better way than just struggling to get by.

Realizing, finally, that bookwork-type jobs weren't for her, she started thinking about hands-on work. Several of her friends reminded her about how she liked to take things apart and work on them. She mulled what type of work she could do with a minimum of tools and training. Someone suggested she investigate Tulsa Technology Center.

She entered testing and remedial training programs in August 1994, when she was 39, and started the following January to train in earnest for her new career in major appliance repair. Within three years she was competing in the national VICA Skills Contest in Kansas City, placing seventh. In 1997 she was inducted into the Vocational National Honor Society.

One area in which she always had a problem, however, was public speaking. Knowing that a great deal of her work in major appliance repair would include talking to customers and businesspeople, she accepted the challenge of competing in a statewide job skills demonstration contest that required her to stand in front of a group of people and demonstrate and explain how to work on a given appliance. She placed fourth.

In 1997 state Sen. Betty Boyd presented Glenda with a Breaking Tradition Award during a session of the state Senate in Oklahoma City. She had demonstrated excellence in what is typically considered a man's job.

Glenda currently is a technician at the Sears Service Center in Tulsa. She commands a decent salary and her job provides the benefits she needs to care for her two sons. Each day she further hones her skills and meets new challenges.

Nicky

Nicky Zimmerman spent 13 years operating his own dairy in western Oklahoma. Over the years, high interest rates and ever-changing government regulations forced him out of business. For five years he struggled to pay bills and survive by doing odd jobs for other farmers. The town of Mountain View is all wheat farms and cows, with no real industrial opportunities any closer than Lawton, about 40 miles to the south.

But Nicky and his wife, Connie, were born and raised in Mountain View, had raised their family there and weren't interested in relocating and starting over at 40. Connie continued to work as a beautician—a skill she had learned while a vo-tech

student in high school—and Nicky applied to my appliance technology course at Tulsa Technology Center. If Nicky were accepted he would have to drive 400 miles round trip each week, find a place to stay in the Tulsa area during the week, be away from his family, give up even minimum-wage employment and attend school with teenagers. But he reasoned that the skills he would learn at Tulsa Tech would prepare him to open his own business in his hometown and make a better living.

Calling on the same determination with which he'd become a prominent square dance caller—with seven recordings out in less than 10 years—he started back to school. He'd known in 1982 that he wanted to be able to call square dances, and he'd succeeded. He realized in 1995 that he needed to learn a skilled trade in order to survive.

When he came into my course and saw the different challenges facing him—such as VICA contests and a great deal of theory, as well as hands-on training—he commented, "I'm going to learn this. I'm going to nationals to compete."

By the time the 1996-97 school term ended, Nicky had managed to win the state VICA Skills Contest, be inducted into the National Vocational Honor Society and place fifth in the National VICA Skills Contest. He also had started his own business, going home on weekends and running service calls for neighbors in a three-county area, then returning to Tulsa to continue his schooling during the week.

Today, he continues to operate his business, runs service calls in a fully equipped van and covers the three counties as a Maytag-authorized servicer and independent repairman. In addition to appliances, he services tractor refrigerated systems. He's a big favorite of the wheat farmers during the summer months.

His wife says Nicky is so much happier now and feels much more fulfilled than he did in the years after he'd lost his life's dream of a dairy farm. His pride is back. Nicky notes, simply, that he's now able to put money in the bank.

When asked if vocational education has helped him, Nicky grins and says, "Oh yeah!"

Noah Harrelson III is a major appliance instructor at Tulsa Technology Center-Peoria Campus in Tulsa, Okla.



**IN THEIR
OWN WORDS**

She Put It in Writing

by Pat Crosier

The following is a copy of a letter I received in April 1998 from one of my former students in the medical assisting program at Tulsa Technology Center's Lemley campus. It's yet another concrete reminder that we vocational educators do make such a difference for so many students.

Dear Mrs. Crosier,

You've been on my mind lately. I'm taking a study break and thought I would write to you and tell you about my life these past few years. When I graduated from Tulsa Technology Center I went to work for a lawyer for the summer, which gave me experience in the legal field but also confirmed that my career desires were else-

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where. Then I received a full scholarship to Tulsa Junior College and went to work full time for T.L. Carey and Associates from the fall of 1995 through the summer of 1996. I learned so much at Dr. Carey's office! The skills I acquired are highlighted on the enclosed resume, so take a look at it and see what you started.

I never lost my desire to go to college, though. I remember telling my mom in October 1995 that I was going to go to the University of Oklahoma the following fall. She thought I was crazy—saying that I didn't have the money, the family didn't have the money and that it just couldn't happen right now. But I didn't lose hope. I mailed off my application on January 1, 1996, and was accepted 15 days later!

I applied for scholarships and got a small one from the school. I also applied for, and was accepted to, the honors program! I transferred 40 college credit hours over from TJC and began school here at OU in August 1996. Within a month I was hired as a medical assistant at the health center on campus; my work there paid for my room and board. I paid for my tuition with the money I had

saved from the previous year.

Today I am less than two years away from my degree in microbiology. I am one class away from a minor in chemistry and hope to minor in Spanish as well.

Although I loved my job at the health center on campus, the money wasn't very good for a college student with bills. In January I began casually looking for a better-paying job that would still fit into my class schedule and was hired as a phlebotomist at Norman Regional Hospital. I'm making 50 percent more an hour and working less. And I love my job. It's very challenging to draw [blood from] hospital patients who are already traumatized by surgery, car accidents and other things. This job will turn into a full-time position this summer, so I think I'm going to stay in Norman, take biochemistry over the summer and work in the lab. Then, in a year or two, depending on my grades, I'll apply for medical school. I'm so excited!

I want to thank you for encouraging me to persevere when it

looked like I wouldn't be able to pursue my education for financial reasons. Guess what? I have no loans so far. My training at Tulsa Tech prepared me to land good jobs and work myself through school. If you ever need someone to put in a good word for technical training, don't hesitate to call on me, because coming to Tulsa Tech was one of the best decisions I ever made. Thank you for being such a wonderful teacher.

*Sincerely,
Barbara Marshall*

Pat Crosier is an instructor in the medical assisting program at Tulsa Technology Center-Lemley Campus in Tulsa, Okla.

A Life-Changing Decision

by Carol Ann Drane

As a member of the special needs staff at my school, it is indeed a challenge, as well as a pleasure, to help meet the educational and personal needs of my students. During the past two years through the Mississippi Department of Education's school-to-work program, many of the special populations students enrolled in building trades got an opportunity to participate in a pilot project with the Associated Builders & Contractors program, which now works in association with the Mississippi Construction/Education Foundation. By participating in this program, students not only gain skills through school-based instruction but also, in the summer, gain on-the-job experience at a work site.

This program is helping to provide students with skills in the

construction industry, but, much to my satisfaction, that's not all it's doing! By being involved in the opportunities vocational education is providing, in programs such as this building trades pilot, students are being helped to make career choices that will steer them toward a successful future. The following is an excerpt from the nominating statement of one of my students, who was named the Mississippi Association of Vocational Educators (MAVE) 1997-98 Outstanding Vocational Secondary Student:

My name is David Hamblin. When I first made the decision to attend Canton Career Center I was undecided about the trade area to choose. I finally decided on building trades and it has been a decision that has changed my life. I was looking for something to do that would give me training for a career and something that was also fun. Building trades has done both of these.

When I first started in building trades I knew very little about what the course involved. However, I found that I enjoyed the hands-on work as well as the academic portion of the class. During

my first year I had the highest overall average. I hope to do the same this year.

The biggest impact building trades has had on me has been my association with the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) program. Participation in this program has helped me decide on a career in the building trades industry. The ABC program allowed me an opportunity to work in the field with a journeyman electrical technician. This experience not only excited me but helped me decide on a career as an electrical technician. After completing my senior year of high school I plan to enroll in construction technology at Holmes Community College in Goodman, Mississippi.

The hands-on training I am receiving from my building trades instructor, Mr. Lee White (who is also nationally board certified), has proven invaluable in helping me accomplish my goals. Vocational education has equipped me with a skill, given me work-place experience and helped me decide on an attainable career goal. I hope other students have the same chance to experience the success and satisfaction I have found in vocational education.

One can only imagine the pride I felt at our annual MAVE spring meeting when David received the Outstanding Vocational Secondary Student award. Tears filled my eyes as I sat there during his speech, thinking about the effect this pilot program and vocational education had made on this young man's life. In two years of working with David I had seen him mature into an individual with a positive outlook on the future and a maturity level boosted by the guidance he had received through vocational education. David has a goal for the future and, as I've told him, I expect great things from him. I'm sure he won't let me—or himself—down.

The support services that special needs personnel provide can and do have an impact on the students with whom we work. We must constantly strive to meet the goals of all our students, because our services make a difference. When I think of the workforce of the future belonging to students like David Hamblin, I know our country will be in very good hands.

Carol Ann Drane is a member of the special needs staff at Canton Career Center in Canton, Miss.

Voc Ed Was the Key

by Charles W. Brodhead

There are countless stories out there of students who've been set on the path to successful careers by voc ed. Here are two students' tributes to the education and training they received.

John

John completed the vocational center's two-year electricity program and, upon graduation from high school, worked for several electrical contractors until taking a job as a machine operator at Borg-Warner Automotive. In October 1997 he qualified for an electrical apprentice position. Here's what John has to say about vocational education:

I never thought of electricity as a career. I was always kind of scared of it. But I went to the electricity class during Vocational Education Advantage Week because a friend of mine was in it.

When I saw what he was doing I really became interested. There was so much to learn and do.

Another plus was the teacher. Before vocational education, I was confused and didn't know what I wanted to do. I had given up on school. He inspired me to stick with it. He changed my whole attitude about education.

For instance, I hadn't done well in math because I hadn't cared. When I found out how important math was to electricity and what I wanted to do, I started doing better—a lot better. I also learned the value of setting a goal and sticking to it. It gives you a good feeling when you achieve it. When I graduated, I was selected "most likely to succeed" in my electricity class. I'm proud of that.

The four-year state-certified apprenticeship program I'm in is just like a college program. The hands-on part I get here at Borg-Warner working with master electricians. For academics such as math and science I take correspondence courses. When I become a journeyman, I'm going to go right on for my master's certification.

My vocational education program was a terrific learning experience. It prepared me for life, taught me a valuable trade, gave me a good education and gave me a good outlook on myself and what I can do.

Lisa

Lisa took the one-year medical office assisting and nurse aide programs at the vocational center before graduating from high school. She continued her medical studies in the two-year radiologic technologists program then offered by the Cayuga Medical Center. Today she is a licensed radiologic technologist and heads the CAT scan unit at the medical center. She says:

Going into high school I knew I wanted a career in the medical field, and that vocational education would get me there. I worked with my guidance counselor to be sure I worked both my academic subjects and vocational programs into my schedule. I really enjoyed vocational courses because they were interesting and I learned a lot. I had outstanding teachers who were role models and coun-

selors all rolled into one.

It was in my vocational education program that I learned about the radiology field. Then, in the radiology program I found I was better prepared than my classmates who didn't have a vocational education background. I used a lot of what I'd learned in vocational education—terminology, patient ethics, good patient care, professionalism and the necessity to do my best for my patients and myself. And the clinical experience reassured me that medicine was for me.

In 15 years as a radiologic technologist I've never been bored. I'm always learning. With a radiologist, I study a patient's history and anatomy. This helps me tailor the images I take to the patient's particular situation. And while I don't do actual diagnosis, I like to test my ability against that of the doctors.

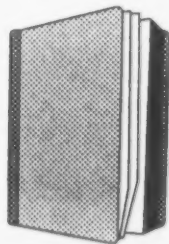
BOCES [the Board of Cooperative Educational Services, which provides voc ed programs for many public schools in New York state] now has a program—New Visions—for college-bound seniors

that is taught at the hospital. I teach a unit on CAT scan, which is a lot of fun. Maybe someday I'll become a teacher.

My husband is a veteran of vocational education, too. He owns his own automotive business. And if my kids want to get involved in vocational education, I'll be very happy.

Charles W. Brodhead is president of The Communications Support Group in Ithaca, N.Y., a firm that develops marketing plans for schools and nonprofit organizations.

LIFE IN THE CLASSROOM



Which Way Is Up?

by Volker Gaul

One of my favorite groups of people to teach is senior citizens. They are always eager to learn, particularly about technology and its uses, and they manage to be very social at the same time. Most come into my classes with very little computer experience, so I always start them out with the basics.

During one class, I was explaining how to use a mouse. Thinking this was an easy task, I quickly showed the students how the movement of the pointer on the screen correlates to the movement of the mouse. "Moving the mouse to the left moves the pointer to the left. Moving the mouse to the right moves the pointer to the right. And, the same goes for up and down." I then let them experiment a little.

After five minutes or so, one student let out an exasperated sigh, and exclaimed, "I just can't get these newfangled devices

to work." Quickly, his fellow students encouraged him to keep trying—if they could do it he could. I came over to see what the problem might be, thinking the mouse might be malfunctioning. The student explained he had no trouble getting the mouse to move left and right as I had shown, but couldn't get it to move up and down.

I asked him to show me the problem. Sure enough, the pointer moved left and right on his command, but stayed stationary as the student lifted the mouse straight up into the air and moved it back down again. Taking advantage of the teachable moment, I quickly corrected the problem.

Now, when I teach mouse usage, I use the words "forward" and "back," rather than "up" and "down." I haven't had any trouble since—especially since I always tell this story at the same time.

Volker Gaul is a computer information systems instructor at Mid-State Technical College in Stevens Point, Wis.

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A Good Impression Trashed

by Rick Zinser

I had my students well prepared for their job shadowing experiences. After all, the impression they would leave with the companies they visited would reflect not only on them, but on my performance as a teacher. I really wanted them to have a good experience and learn a lot about the various jobs we had been discussing in class.

With the help of three local companies I was able to set up 10 different hosts for my students to shadow—including jobs in production, engineering, quality, tooling and the like. Each student chose five employers to visit, once a week for five weeks. Since I was familiar with each of the jobs I carefully briefed students on what to expect at each workplace. Students then pre-

pared lists of questions to ask their hosts, such as the kind of training and experience they would need to do the job and what employees liked best about the work.

I'm also familiar with the employability aspects of organizations because I used to be a human resource manager. So I was careful to coach students on important details like dressing appropriately, being on time and having pen and paper with them. They also were instructed to ask their hosts for a business card so they could follow up with a thank-you letter. With all these preparations I was confident the students would do a good job and gain some valuable experience.

The day after the first round of job shadowing I called a contact at one of the companies to see how everything had gone there. He gave me a play-by-play description. The student arrived on time, was very polite, dressed nicely, etc. The job shadow itself was very productive and informative. But then the host described the concluding moments of the experience.

As the student was leaving the building the host was telling the receptionist about the visit and how the student was a nice young man. They agreed that job shadowing was a great way to expose students to the working world and get businesses involved in the schools. As they talked they watched through the window as the student got into his car in the company parking lot.

That's when what had been a completely positive experience took a sour if not quite ruinous turn. As the car pulled away the student threw a bag of junk food wrappers out the window and onto the business's parking lot!

I guess one more commandment should be added to the list of employability do's and don'ts: Thou Shalt Not Litter—particularly in your job shadow's lot, while your job shadow's looking.

Rick Zinser is an assistant professor of career and technical education at Western Michigan University in Portage. He also teaches a school-to-work class for high school students in Kalamazoo.

Unexpected Lessons

by Ellen Cooney

We teach youth about owning their own business. We give them hands-on experience in running a venture of their own—a concession stand, a vending machine, a crafts fair. Each class interviews local entrepreneurs, brainstorms new ideas for the owner and writes memos to the entrepreneurs. We help students open their own bank accounts, use computers and make a video of a sales pitch. And, best of all, students get to keep the profits from the ventures they run.

We approach each new class with a clear idea that this is what we will teach, and in many classes, it actually goes that way. Then there are other classes where some totally different lessons are learned—both by us and our students.

The unexpected lessons arise as we cope with the overwhelming realities of the lives that many of our students lead. For

example, in one class, when asked what his long-term goals were, one student responded, "Living." And that was not a wisecrack.

In another class, we were discussing start-up capital and where young folks might get the money to start a business. We were getting the usual answers—the money might come from parents, friends, saving up allowances—when one girl said, "You could ask God." She went on to explain, "You know, how sometimes your family is completely out of money, you have no food, you can't even get diapers for the baby, then you pray to God and sometimes you get things."

Then there was our class a year ago for girls from two housing projects. Out of 10 students, none was fed breakfast at home before coming to our all-day classes (we ended up providing meals). One was clearly hyperactive; four of these 10- and 11-year-olds sucked their thumbs constantly.

During the two weeks of that class, unexpected lessons

included having the class compose sympathy messages when the 16-year-old brother of one of our students was shot and killed. We also listened and tried to support two sisters whose mother was cited for child negligence; each day, one of the girls was being left home as the sole caretaker for their other sister, age 3, who had the chicken pox.

In the midst of all this, the class developed a song and dance routine—to the tune of “Come On, Ride This Train”—to advertise its concession stand. What a treat to see them perform this for guest speakers, parents and staff.

A class we ran in the summer for boys from a housing project provided more unexpected lessons. We were expecting a group of 10- to 12-year-old boys. Because of a conflict in scheduling for the summer camp that hosted us, we found ourselves with a small group of 9- and 10-year-olds. By the end of the first day, we had discovered that most of them could not count out change for a dollar and that they could barely read, write or do simple math. And one student, William, did not speak at all. We

almost despaired as we scrambled to revamp nearly everything we had planned for the week.

In the next day or two, as we changed our sights, this became one of the most rewarding classes we have worked with. In a brainstorming session to name the concession stand they would operate each day, the boys agreed to call it "The Hard Working Store"—reinforcing a work ethic especially needed in their neighborhood.

The boys also were thrilled at the opportunity to use our computers. If nothing else, hours spent at the computers during and after class developed some much-needed eye-hand coordination for using a mouse.

It was with computers that we experienced a breakthrough with William. We had asked the class to imagine a business they wanted to run, and to get on the computer to design a flyer advertising the imagined business. William caught on to the computer program faster than most of the other students, and

he designed a poster for "William's Dog Store."

As we sat at the computer to help him polish the flyer a bit, William spoke for the first time—whispering that he loved dogs and that he had a rottweiler at home. (We never were sure whether this was true or imaginary, since pets are forbidden by the housing authority.)

A real transformation took place as William started to talk with us. He had been the kid a bully can spot from miles away—small, shy, quiet and vulnerable. We had spent much of the week restraining other students from teasing him. Somehow, though, as he began to speak the other students changed their approach and almost "adopted" William, picking him for their teams and helping him along.

Most miraculous of all, when we formed teams to develop a sales pitch that would be videotaped, William's team convinced him to accept a speaking part. Yes, we even have a video of William speaking in public.

Are these the milestones we expected? No way. But we are learning that often the unexpected lessons are the best ones.

Ellen Cooney is president of Start-Up Education, a nonprofit organization with offices in Atlanta and Pueblo West, Colo., that teaches entrepreneurship to youth ages 10 through 18.

Some Food for Thought

by Robert A. Hall

On the first day of the new semester, a tall young man named Charlie walks into my first period drafting class. His hair is somewhat close cropped but with that slept-on look, his shirt is untucked, his sleeves hang loose and unbuttoned on his arms and his shoes are untied. My first impression of Charlie is that of someone who is not interested in his surroundings and probably is not a good student.

Pop quiz day: Charlie has been present and on time every day. He has turned in all his assignments in neat handwriting and seems to be paying attention. He is the only one to ace my quiz. Appearance? No change.

First sketching assignment: Thirty minutes into the class all of the students are busy working except Charlie, who is flipping through the drafting text. I approach him and ask if he needs help. He says, "No, sir." I ask, "Why aren't you working on the assignment?" His response? "I'm all done." I look over his work and find that not only are all four sketches done, but they look more like renderings than sketches. The reason he gives for not turning in the work is that I was busy helping other students and he did not want to interrupt.

Charlie has turned out to be my best student, and with encouragement has been a help to other students in the class.

Let's ask ourselves: How often do we make judgments on expectations based solely on appearance? As classroom teachers, do we tend to jump to conclusions and automatically think students like Charlie lack initiative?

I had two Hispanic students in my technology education class. One seemed to be a good student and the other a poor one.

During class, I noticed that they always sat near the back of the classroom and talked constantly in hushed tones. I spoke to them about it, asking them to stop talking during class and pay attention to what was going on.

The next day the same behavior was repeated. I finally told them to see me after class. I asked them to explain why they continued to talk in class when they had been asked to stop. I was convinced they were just being disruptive.

The older of the two students said, "My friend does not speak English as well as I do and he does not understand the words you use to describe the things we study. I explain to him your words while you are talking so he understands."

What we had was a language barrier, not a behavior problem. Upon realizing this, I decided we needed to translate the text's key technical terms into Spanish. I had all the vocabulary words for the class translated into Spanish, using the two Hispanic students as proofreaders. Both students were given a copy of the

translated terms.

Their grades quickly improved, not only in tech ed but in ESL [English as a second language] class, because we began teaching them vocabulary in their area of interest. They also volunteered to help with translations in the future so that other Spanish-speaking students could understand the technical terms used in class.

Let's ask ourselves: How can we adapt curriculum content to diverse student needs? What assumptions do we teachers make when students are talking in our classroom?

Robert A. Hall is the program coordinator for technology education at the New Hampshire State Prison in Concord.

The Recycling Plant

by Jane C. Rasmussen

I pull into the deepest recesses of the gravel parking lot under the freeway, hoping to escape a trek through the mud puddles found in more exposed areas. Five years ago they promised to pave the lot. Will it be done before I retire? I wonder, as my foot sinks into the muddy rut outside the car door.

I unload the box filled with textbooks, cleaning supplies, lunch and recent-but-read magazines, hoping the door will just once be unlocked so I won't have to park the clumsy load on the sidewalk while I rummage for a key. But it's locked, of course.

I exit the elevator and step onto the floor of the former factory, hoping construction of the new dislocated worker learning center is just one task closer to completion. But the electricians have refused to work until they get their paychecks, the recep-

tionist reports. That means no one else will either, until the political kinks are worked out.

I walk across the steel trap doors by the receptionist's desk believing they won't give way beneath me though they sway as I cross over them. That same faith does not extend to the ceiling that rattles and shakes as machines are dragged across the floor above.

Fans in the window try unsuccessfully to blow away uncontrolled heat and fumes coming up from the shoe factory below—one of several enterprises established in this old factory building to encourage minority business development. Putting on rubber gloves to protect my hands, I rearrange the construction dust that has settled overnight on desks, books and the monitors of 16 computers. This classroom is a breeding ground for psoriasis, upper respiratory irritations, burning eyes and itching skin but it remains OSHA-free because no one wants to pull the plug on free rent. Coffeepot going ... phone messages acknowledged ... yesterday's attendance recorded ... monthly

reports processed, Xeroxed and faxed to proper government agencies. Were there really 995 hours of student attendance in March alone?

FIRST STUDENT—Reading score: Fifth grade, sixth month. Math score: Seventh grade. Last employer: Briggs and Stratton, for 25 years. Immediate career goals: GED, then uncertain. Age: 52. Also needs computer skills because everyone is asking for them. Disabilities: Can't write for very long because of old arm injuries; will probably need another surgery in the next few months, the third one in the past 10 years. Attitude: Scared by all the competition for low-skilled jobs from the W-2 job seekers being forced to vacate welfare. Hope: To find a job to help ease him into retirement, still a decade away.

SECOND STUDENT—Some college, years ago. Last employer: Milwaukee County Hospital, for 10 years. Immediate career goals: Computer literacy, return to school, but not in health care. "What are the good careers?" she asks. Age: 49. Attitude: Hopeful; school has meant past success.

STAFF MEETING—The computers are failing because of the dust. What can we do? We need to upgrade the computers. Who can do it? What new materials need to be ordered if we upgrade? How can we make the lessons more jobs-relevant? What happened to the micrometer? It's missing from the lab. Can we get some help from a second teacher?

IMPRESSIONS—Students start drifting into the lab. Keyboards clack wildly. The lab teacher circulates from computer question to computer question. Job seekers travel the Internet in quest of openings. Resumes, cover letters, revised resumes, revised cover letters ... Some gather at tables to review math, reading and writing from textbooks. So much forgotten from classes held so long ago. Employment tests can be merciless.

The math group moves to another cubicle for a quick lesson on fractions. Virginia brings in a bouquet of roses to salute Rosemary's high school graduation at 52. "The cake is by the coffee machine; be sure to enjoy!"

A Job Service counselor inquires if Jo Ann can type 45 words per minute yet; someone has an opening.

"How do you print resumes on good paper?"

"It's been great having you here; good luck on your job!"

"Sorry to hear about your grandmother's death."

"Job Service needs a progress report. How soon does your case-worker need it?"

"Diane just passed the entrance exam for the office repair program on campus. She doesn't need remedial algebra!"

"Nancy is back; she didn't make it through the probationary period. She got the GED. Now how do we get her to change her attitude toward authority?"

"Tim starts in shipping and receiving tomorrow. He needs to finish Microsoft Access class somewhere else. Got any ideas?"

"You need a doctor but you don't have health care insurance

anymore? Let's see whom we can call."

"You have got to get to campus to take the social studies GED test this week—no more stalling! You can do it. Here, try this practice test."

"Eugene, filling out the registration form for college is the true placement test. If you can follow the bulletin you are ready for college. Look for the codes in the front of the bulletin."

"You graduated from high school, trained other workers, supervised, and no one knew you couldn't read above third-grade level? Didn't anyone ever test you for a learning disability? How about going to DVR now that you have the opportunity?"

"What is that commotion in the other room? It's hard enough to study with the construction and factory noise. What? The police have surrounded the building across the street! Someone has taken a hostage at gunpoint and fired twice! Stay away from the windows!"

"It's so good to see you again, Bernice. You came in on your day off to continue working on that GED? Great. Let's get going."

#

The April meeting of workplace education instructors is held at the Delco plant. I pass through a revolving door just off the paved lot. I'm guided upstairs to a lush, carpeted corporate learning center paid for by 5 cents off of every worker's hourly wage. The instructors have laid out a smorgasbord of fruit, tarts, bagels, cookies, sweet breads, juices and soda. The room is hot so the union rep turns on the air conditioning.

I'm almost too tired to participate, but it seems we're fighting for our jobs so a java jolt rejuvenates the tired mind. The school needs more reason to justify our programs. Why should they subsidize outreach services? We need to gather more statistics to explain our value to the money crunchers on campus. What information can we pull together?

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I leave this rather uninspired meeting. Maybe, I think, I'll be the next to be admitted to the "recycling" plant where I teach.

Jane C. Rasmussen is a workplace education basic skills instructor at Milwaukee Area Technical College in Wisconsin. She is outstationed at the Milwaukee Job Center Network HIRE Center for Dislocated Workers.

THE POETS' CORNER



Why Are You a Teacher?

by Linda B. Shelton

What do I do? you ask
A simple question to you.
I teach how to do hair, I say
You know, how to do a hairdo.

Why do you do this? you ask
You still want to know.
Because it's a challenge, I say
Although the pay is low.

I love to see the excitement
When an accomplishment is made.

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The victory of competition
And a smile that just won't fade.

Every day is not all fun
But if each day I see
A student get closer to success
That's good enough for me.

New subjects are hard to understand
So each skill I teach with zest.
When at least an 85 is made on each test
Then I know I've done my best.

I've learned to care about their lives
Their pain I often share.
When you're with a student every day
Your heart just has to care.

I also see the joy in their eyes

When they have achieved a new goal.
Their gratefulness and their thankfulness
Makes my choice of profession a great role.

Money isn't everything
Although it pays the bills.
The greatest reason that I teach
Is the way it makes me feel.

*Linda B. Shelton is a cosmetology educator at Hickman High School in Centerville,
Tenn.*

Because the Student

by Tom Lopp

Because the student
has a need,
We have a job to do.

Because the student
has a choice,
We must be the better choice.

Because the student
has sensibilities,
We must be considerate.

Because the student
is unique,
We must be flexible.

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Because the student
and parents
have high expectations,
We must excel.

Because the student
is the future,
We must seek
continuous improvement.

Tom Lopp is president and chief executive officer of Students First, an education consulting firm in Olympia, Washington, and a former president of the American Vocational Association.

111107

On Teachers and Students

by Larry Hudson

... because I care!

When people ask me, "What do you do?"
I answer without hesitation—"I teach."
Sometimes they follow up
With the "Why?" question,
But more often they just look puzzled.

So I volunteer an explanation.
"It is because I care, you see,"
but they don't see.

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They don't see the courage in students' eyes,
The motivation in their hearts,
Or the success on their faces
When it all comes together.

You can see it if you look,
And understand that they are trying, really trying.
You can see it when they succeed;
Maybe for the first time ever.
But first, you have to care.

Sometimes I even wonder out loud to myself,
"Why do I teach?"
the answer is always—
" ... because I care."

The non-traditional

They call me non-traditional—
I often wonder why.
Is it because I'm different?
Or are they afraid to see
The individual within—
the real me?

There are some things about me you should know.
I am a bit older—at that in-between age.
I could be a parent or just a responsible adult.
Maybe I'm changing directions in life—
It happens to each of us.

This is also me—the non-traditional.
I have no time for nonsense because I have a goal.
Runarounds I can't tolerate, as I have a life to lead.

Working is necessary, so time is very precious.
Motivated I am; be prepared for me.

I have a right to be here and the will to succeed.
I am doing something different; it is my life you see.
Is it because I have my goal and you don't think I
should?
Am I the non-traditional or are you afraid to see—
That next week or next year you could be me?

Maybe, when we really know each other,
There won't be a non-traditional.

Remember me?

I am described as shy or introverted,
sitting in the back of the room or at the edge
where I won't be noticed.

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When you call on me I answer,
timidly, offering only what is necessary.
I don't volunteer—I can't.

But I am there in your classroom—one of your students.
You know my name—don't you?
I am not even sure that you see me,
Even when you look.

Sometimes I feel like this crumpled note I wrote,
but couldn't give to you right away.
It was ready to be tossed away
yet retrieved at the last minute.
Will I be?

You seem to understand me, yet I hesitated. Why?
Is it so hard to be recognized?
What can I do?

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When will I become somebody?

Soon I will leave your classroom and go on—
will you remember me?

One starfish at a time ...

A starfish gets washed up on the beach, stranded,
with no means of getting back to sea,
except by tide or accident.
We all know this story.

The same is true of students.
Goals are identified and life founders them.
They become stranded on the beach or
stuck on a sandbar,
with no apparent way of achieving their goals
and improving their lives.

They can't get back to sea;
there is no returning tide and no accident.
There is only you and me.

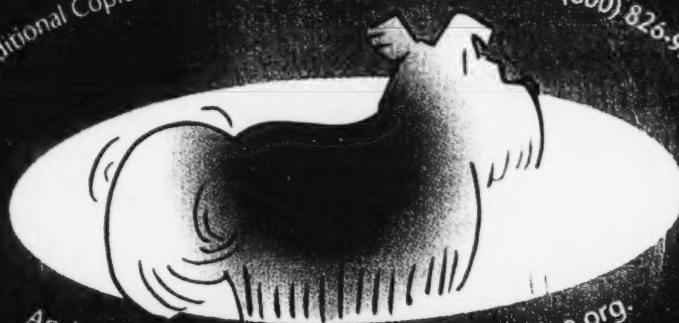
That's why I have to help you and so do you—
it is important to each person.
We can't afford to leave them stranded on the
beach.
It makes a difference to the starfish you know.

That's what teachers are really—starfish savers.
So, I'll be here on the beach waiting and
just picking them up and carrying them back to sea
...
one starfish at a time.

Larry Hudson is a vocational teacher educator at the University of Central Florida in Orlando who writes of his experiences with teachers and students. These poems are printed with permission from Because I care, by Larry Hudson (1998, ISBN 0-9664642-0-6).

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